



Evaluation of UNHCR's Engagement in Humanitarian-Development Cooperation

Executive Summary

SEPTEMBER 2021

Conducted by:

GPPI: Dr. Julia Steets; Dr. Julian Lehmann

Contributions: Urban Reichhold; Dr. Alexander Gaus; Janika Spannagel

ISDC: Prof. Dr. Tilman Brück; Dr. Ghassan Baliki; Dr. Neil Ferguson; Laura Peitz, Oscar Díaz

GPPI

GLOBAL PUBLIC POLICY
INSTITUTE

ISDC

INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY AND
DEVELOPMENT
CENTER

Executive summary

Background

This report contains the findings of an evaluation of UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation. As part of this cooperation, UNHCR variously acts as a catalyst for development engagement on forced displacement; leverages the influence of development actors for protection and policy advocacy with governments; gradually links services for refugees with national systems; and expands its support for self-reliance. The evaluation was commissioned by UNHCR because recent high-level policy developments and initiatives, such as the 2016 Global Compact on Refugees, support a more comprehensive response to displacement, involving both humanitarian and development actors. UNHCR plays a key role in implementing this reform agenda.

The evaluation was conducted between 2018 and 2021. This relatively long timeframe enabled the evaluation team to trace efforts and their results over time, and to support learning by regularly discussing the emerging findings and their implications with UNHCR colleagues working at different levels. Data collection focused on four UNHCR country operations (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Jordan and Niger) and involved several country visits, a total of 551 semi-structured interviews, 19 focus group discussions with refugees and host communities, a staff survey and quantitative analyses based on UNHCR datasets.

UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation

The evaluation found a consistent perception among interviewees that UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation has increased over the past five years. UNHCR has systematically built partnerships with a number of multilateral and bilateral development actors. The partnership with the World Bank Group is exemplary and shapes UNHCR's narrative on and approach to humanitarian-development cooperation. Cooperation with the EU, the OECD and some bilateral development actors has become more systematic. Cooperation with individual UN agencies has also increased, but engagement with the UN development system as a whole, other multilateral development banks, NGOs and the private sector has been less systematic.

In most cases considered by this evaluation, UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation has focused on influential development donors with a strategic focus on displacement and reflects available opportunities. However, there were also calls for certain strategic adjustments. For example, UNHCR's engagement with the UN development system as a whole was less advanced than engagement with other actors. Examples of cooperation on the rule of law and access to justice were positive, but small in number and scale. Most examples of cooperation covered by the evaluation focused on host communities and refugees, with little apparent focus on issues of internal displacement.

Crucially, most of UNHCR's observed recent efforts to strengthen humanitarian-development cooperation have focused on engaging with external actors, while UNHCR's own programmes often continue to conduct "business as usual" in parallel and provide direct services to refugees without consistently focusing on how to gradually integrate refugees into local and national service systems.

Factors influencing humanitarian-development cooperation

The level of cooperation between UNHCR and development actors depends heavily on external factors, such as host government policy positions and donor policies and priorities. However, internal UNHCR factors also play an enabling role: UNHCR leadership's clear commitment to humanitarian-development cooperation has translated into a high degree of awareness and agreement across the organization, and new staff positions and units created to support such cooperation have enabled UNHCR's increased engagement with development actors. UNHCR's protection mandate, strong field presence and coordination role are key assets in its cooperation with development actors. Its access to data on refugees and other persons of concern is also critical, and investments in this area are evident.

Internal factors also constrain humanitarian-development cooperation, even as key parts of UNHCR's systems are currently undergoing reform. Firstly, UNHCR's position on mobilizing resources from development actors has been unclear and/or misunderstood, and the time and resources required for engaging with development actors have not consistently been included in UNHCR's core budgets and standard job descriptions. This has created disincentives for managers at the country and sub-national levels to engage in humanitarian-development cooperation, erected obstacles for the effective implementation of programmes funded by development actors, and created gaps in UNHCR's capacity to cooperate with development actors. Secondly, while much of UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation has been driven by dedicated staff positions within the organization, other staff members' contributions have been more uneven and the role of UNHCR's Regional Bureaux has been unclear. Thirdly, gaps in the organization's capacity to gather, analyse and share relevant data persist, despite recent investments. Finally, there are still gaps in UNHCR's capacity to provide thought leadership on protection issues and to fully leverage its protection expertise for humanitarian-development cooperation.

Effects of UNHCR's increased engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation

Even though the aforementioned high-level commitments to strengthening humanitarian-development cooperation in displacement contexts are still relatively new, the evaluation found evidence that UNHCR's increased engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation is already having a discernible effect at different levels.

A number of key **development actors** have recently increased their focus on forced displacement, creating dedicated funding instruments for and/or policies on forced displacement. While UNHCR had little influence on the political dynamics underlying this shift, it has helped translate these dynamics

into concrete commitments and agreements. Relevant funding instruments include the World Bank's Window for Host Communities and Refugees and the Global Concessional Financing Facility, the EU's regional trust funds, the African Development Bank's inclusive funding for COVID-19, Germany's special initiative on tackling the root causes of displacement, stabilizing host regions and supporting refugees, as well as the US' and the UK's traditionally strong support for addressing forced displacement. In the four case-study countries examined by this evaluation, these instruments translated into significant investments by development actors in refugee-hosting areas.

There are plenty of examples for UNHCR's practical support in enabling development actors to plan and implement their programmes in areas affected by displacement more quickly and easily. There are also instances in which UNHCR clearly influenced programme designs, including for the Niger Refugees and Host Communities Support Project, the Jordan Compact, the Jordan Health Development Partner Forum's initiative to support the reintroduction of subsidized rates for refugees using public health care, the land development programme in Melkadida, Ethiopia, the Ethiopia Jobs Compact and the international community's joint advocacy agenda with the Government of Bangladesh.

UNHCR and its development partners have little influence on many of the key factors affecting **host government policies** towards refugees. Nevertheless, there is evidence that UNHCR's global engagement helped encourage a small number of host governments to pledge policy changes that will transform key aspects of how they manage refugee responses. The 30 largest refugee-hosting countries made a total of 121 policy pledges related to the Global Compact on Refugees. This includes, for example, commitments by the Government of Ethiopia to expand its out-of-camp policy for refugees, to increase enrolment of refugee children in education and to expand access to social services and documentation for refugees.

In some areas, this engagement with host governments also supported the implementation of those policy changes. This includes, for example, the adoption of a new Refugee Proclamation in Ethiopia, the authorization of several practical changes like the introduction of formal education for Rohingya children in Bangladesh and the issuance of work permits for Syrian refugees in Jordan. At the same time, important investments in host government capacities and relevant service systems and infrastructure were made. Progress in using humanitarian-development cooperation to establish more direct relations between UNHCR and a broader range of line ministries in the case-study countries, by contrast, has been more limited.

Using rigorous quantitative analysis of UNHCR datasets and evidence from focus group discussions, the evaluation team was able to establish the effects of a few select cases of humanitarian-development cooperation on **refugees and host communities**. Work permits had a stronger positive effect on refugees' socioeconomic situations than aid workers or even refugees themselves perceived. Having a work permit also had a positive effect on protection, as it significantly decreased the odds of refugees indicating specific protection needs and of having to send children to work or to accept risky, degrading, exploitative or illegal temporary jobs to meet basic needs. By contrast, the reintroduction of subsidized health-care rates for refugees in Jordan also illustrates the trade-offs of

cooperation. On average, refugees incurred higher costs for and had slightly lower rates of access to health care when using subsidized national public health-care systems, as compared to parallel humanitarian health-care services (which were more readily available when these subsidies were suspended).

In Ethiopia, registration of births of refugee children increased following the government's pledges linked to the Global Compact on Refugees. Other factors being held equal, children with birth certificates were more likely to be enrolled in education than those without certificates. Families with at least one child whose birth was registered were more likely to return to their countries of origin. Other available evidence also points to the predominantly positive effects of humanitarian-development cooperation on refugees and host communities. For example, the construction of photovoltaic power plants in Jordan made electricity more readily available in refugee camps and surrounding areas, while a land transformation project created social housing for both host communities and refugees in Niger. In Ethiopia, a livelihoods programme increased income and consumption levels among both the participating host community members and refugees.

While increased humanitarian-development cooperation had predominantly positive effects on development partners, the policies of host governments as well as refugees and host communities, its impact on **UNHCR and its implementing and cooperating partners** has been relatively limited so far. The most important effect noted by the evaluation team is a largely positive effect on UNHCR's reputation. UNHCR's investments in additional staff capacity and institutional structures have enabled positive effects on refugees and host communities, but they have not allowed UNHCR to hand over many responsibilities to other actors and to substantially reprioritize its activities. The only negative effects on UNHCR and its partners noted are: a strain on relationships with national refugee agencies in some cases where other line ministries become involved in providing services to refugees, as well as an increased degree of uncertainty among staff members as a consequence of increased humanitarian-development cooperation and other ongoing change processes.

COVID-19 and humanitarian-development cooperation

UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation intersected with its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in several ways. In the short term, the pandemic led to a reprioritization of the humanitarian response, as UNHCR and its partners shifted their focus to responding to the evolving health crisis. In several contexts, the pandemic response benefited from existing humanitarian-development cooperation. In Niger, for example, the COVID-19 response plan covered nationals and refugees alike; in Jordan, similar criteria and modalities were used for the cash facility and the national social protection scheme, and job protections also applied to refugees. In Bangladesh, respective investments in the public health infrastructure benefited both host communities and refugees. In Ethiopia, by contrast, the COVID-19 response was less integrated than the stakeholders consulted for this evaluation had expected.

In the longer term, the pandemic's socioeconomic effects are expected to create challenges that may hamper efforts to achieve more self-reliance among refugees. At the same time, there are also indications that the pandemic has created new opportunities for humanitarian-development cooperation, as some governments have become more open to the idea of pursuing inclusive policies and more development funding will likely be available for emergency situations such as health crises caused by COVID-19.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on these findings, the evaluation team concludes that UNHCR's enhanced engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation is a rewarding strategy. UNHCR has implemented a number of relevant, effective institutional measures to support humanitarian-development cooperation and has initiated a range of important reform processes to address the remaining obstacles. For example, UNHCR is introducing multi-annual planning, updating the organization's results framework and aligning it with the Sustainable Development Goals, and reforming aspects of the budget allocation process.

These efforts have contributed to a significant increase in the extent of humanitarian-development cooperation. The evaluation also demonstrates that this increased cooperation has primarily positive effects on both refugees and host communities. At the same time, the evaluation also identified space for certain strategic adjustments of UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation as well as internal factors that constrain this cooperation.

The evaluation team makes six recommendations to encourage UNHCR to continue and adapt its focus on and investments in humanitarian-development cooperation. Suggested steps for implementing these recommendations are in chapter 7 at the end of this report:

Recommended actions	Responsible
<p>1. Clarify UNHCR's objectives and priorities on humanitarian-development cooperation in the organisation's updated Strategic Directions, in the upcoming Development Action strategy paper, guidance on Multi Year Strategic Plans, and global partnership and sector strategies. In clarifying UNHCR's objectives and priorities UNHCR should specifically set out how it will strengthen engagement with the UN development system, expand cooperation with development actors on rule of law and access to justice, more systematically cooperate with development actors on internal displacement, and describe how UNHCR will prepare and invest for its facilitation, supervision, monitoring, reporting and advocacy roles.</p>	<p>Division of Resilience and Solutions and Division of International Protection with support from Division of Strategic Planning and Results, Division of External Relations, Principal Adviser on Internal Displacement, Division of Human Resources and the Transformation and Change Service</p>
<p>2. Systematically pursue the integration of services for refugees with national and local service systems throughout UNHCR's own programmes, focusing multi-year planning on this objective and strengthening incentives.</p>	<p>Division of Strategic Planning and Results and Division of Resilience and Solutions with support from Division of Human Resources, Transformation and Change Service and the Division of International Protection</p>
<p>3. Ensure that UNHCR core budgets that country operations are authorized to spend and standard job descriptions include the time and resources to engage with development actors and processes. Clarify under what conditions UNHCR seeks funding for its own activities from development actors and make these contributions additional to regular core budgets.</p>	<p>Division of Strategic Planning and Results and Division of Human Resources with support from Division of External Relations and the Division of Resilience and Solutions</p>
<p>4. Make UNHCR's support structure for humanitarian-development cooperation more effective by clarifying the role of the Regional Bureaux and strengthening the focus of staff members dedicated to humanitarian-development cooperation on internal change processes.</p>	<p>Division of Resilience and Solutions, Transformation and Change Service and the Regional Bureaux</p>
<p>5. Accelerate efforts to strengthen UNHCR's capacity for and practice of collecting, analysing and sharing data.</p>	<p>Global Data Service with support from Division of Strategic Planning and Results, Division of Resilience and Solutions and the Division of International Protection</p>
<p>6. Make the role of protection in humanitarian-development cooperation more explicit and exercise this role more actively, specifically in terms of planning and analysis, providing operational protection advice, monitoring the situation of persons of concern and cooperating directly with development actors.</p>	<p>Division of International Protection with support from Global Data Service, Division of Strategic Planning and Results and the Division of Resilience and Solutions</p>